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POLICY ISSUES: EMERGING POLICY ISSUES

Implementation of Governing Council decision 17/27: "Action for countries with economies in transition"

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present report outlines progress achieved in implementing Governing Council decision 17/27. The new geopolitical context in Central and Eastern Europe requires an imaginative approach to handling an extremely complex and rapidly evolving environmental situation, as recognized in the preamble of Agenda 21. The UNEP work programme in Europe was developed in light of these changing circumstances and in full cooperation with the Governments concerned, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and relevant organizations, taking into account the priorities defined at the Lucerne Conference on Environment for Europe. It addresses all the countries with economies in transition belonging to the Economic Commission for Europe, a list of which is to be found in the annex to this document. An intensive process of consultations with European Governments, initiated by UNEP's Regional Office for Europe, brought to light a number of environmental needs not addressed through UNEP's global activities or the activities of other organizations. The UNEP Coordinated Programme for Europe aims at obtaining an improved understanding of regional needs and priorities; developing operative partnerships; coordinating programme design and implementation; strengthening UNEP and Global Environment Facility (GEF) operations in countries with economies in transition; and identifying and formulating new projects. The present report presents first the activities carried out during the 1994-1995 biennium, and then a brief description of the activities planned for 1996-1997.

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Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Council may wish to take note of the progress achieved so far in assisting the countries with economies in transition with their environmental problems within the framework of the "Environment for Europe" process and request the Executive Director to continue these efforts, particularly to develop the survey on the environmental activities and priorities in the European region into a database as a tool for policy and priority-setting in the region.

I. ACTION UNDERTAKEN BY UNEP IN 1994-1995 IN COUNTRIES WITH ECONOMIES IN TRANSITION

A. Encouraging a regional policy dialogue on environmental issues

1. UNEP's Regional Office for Europe (ROE) has stimulated dialogue on policy and strategic directions in a number of areas of direct concern to the countries in transition. ROE provided a forum on such issues as joint implementation of the Climate Convention, biodiversity, and military activities and the environment. A regional workshop on the last-mentioned issue will be convened jointly by Sweden, ECE and others in 1995.

2. Briefing sessions with the Permanent Missions to the United Nations in Geneva have become a regular feature of ROE activities. The Caspian Sea is an example of an area for which the Office facilitated regional coordination and policy development. In 1995, an inter-agency consultation was organized by ROE, followed by a UNDP/World Bank/UNEP fact-finding mission to prepare a regional environmental action plan for the Caspian Sea. This initiative followed studies on sea-level rise by a task team established by UNEP in 1994.

3. UNEP is contributing fully to preparations for the Ministerial Conference on the Environment scheduled for October 1995 at Sofia, Bulgaria, and will support in particular attendance by countries with economies in transition.

4. At the request of some Governments, ROE in 1995 initiated a survey of environmental activities and priorities in the European region in order to get a clear mapping of the main activities of international and regional organizations in the environmental field and avoid duplication of efforts. It is intended that the survey be developed into a database, enabling ROE to build on UNEP's strengths and avoid duplication of efforts in the region.

B. Strengthening environmental management capabilities

5. In 1993, UNEP and ECE launched a joint project for strengthening environmental management capabilities in Eastern and Central European countries through a series of regional workshops entitled "Legal and Regulatory Framework for Environmental Management," "Institutional Arrangements and Coordination Mechanisms for Environmental Planning and Management," "Environmental Policy Planning and Management Techniques," and "Application of Economic Instruments for Environmental Management." The project resulted in "Guidelines on Integrated Environmental Management in Countries in Transition", which were approved by the ECE Committee on

Environmental Policy in April 1994 and widely disseminated in English, French and Russian. An information database on policies and practices for environmental management in countries with economies in transition was set up as result of the project.

C. Assistance for the implementation of the global environmental conventions

6. UNEP has facilitated a pan-European dialogue on the implementation of global environmental conventions and provided technical assistance to the countries with economies in transition in this respect. ROE provided a platform for informal exchanges of information on issues such as joint implementation and biosafety, in full cooperation with the relevant convention secretariats and without prejudice to the ongoing negotiating process. In 1994, a subregional workshop was organized for the Baltic countries to facilitate the ratification and implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The workshop was instrumental in helping, for example, Latvia to take steps to ratify the Convention, and Estonia to request a biodiversity country study from UNEP. Its results will be brought to the attention of the Sofia Conference. A similar workshop is planned in 1995 for all Central and Eastern European countries.

7. In 1994, the Ozone Secretariat, GEF, ROE and the Interstate Ecological Council jointly organized a meeting at Minsk, Belarus, on the implementation of the Montreal Protocol in the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic States. The meeting succeeded in bringing donors' attention to the Central Asian Republics and in giving them the tools to ratify the Montreal Protocol. On this occasion, a cooperation agreement was signed between UNEP and the Interstate Ecological Council.

8. In 1995, an environmental legislation regional workshop will be convened by UNEP to further promote the implementation of global environmental conventions in countries with economies in transition.

9. Through such actions, UNEP discharges its mandate to ensure implementation of global conventions by Governments in a cost-effective way, by ensuring coordinated transfer of technology and capacity-building.

D. Other activities in support of countries with economies in transition

10. The technical experience gained by UNEP over the years in providing environmental assistance to Governments was fully used in the development of the UNEP programme for the countries with economies in transition. Many of the activities included in the various sub-programmes of the 1994-1995 programme of work benefit those countries directly or indirectly. This applies in particular to the areas of water, regional seas, terrestrial ecosystems including desertification, environmental health, environment economics, toxic chemicals and wastes, industry, and environmental information systems. Further details of these programmes in countries with economies in transition are contained in a background document available on request and entitled "UNEP activities in support of countries with economies in transition under various sub-programmes".

II. ACTIVITIES PLANNED FOR 1996-1997

11. UNEP, through ROE, will continue to assess the most urgent and emerging environmental needs of the countries with economies in transition, as well as the risks of duplication between existing programmes. To that end, the database set up at ROE on regional environmental activities and programmes will be completed and updated on a regular basis. Close cooperation will be maintained with the European Environmental Agency and United Nations bodies.

12. The special programme for countries with economies in transition, set up by ROE, will focus in 1996-1997 on assistance to Governments in building their environmental infrastructure and integrating environmental concerns into the economic transition, developing environmental legislation and intersectoral linkages, and promoting cross-fertilization between programmes. ROE will support in particular the participation of countries with economies in transition in region-wide debates on sustainable production and consumption patterns and ways of steering economic development within the bounds of the environment's carrying capacity. It will also be involved in the preparation of a pan-European strategy for regional seas, and continue its activities related to the Caspian and Aral Seas, and the implementation of international conventions.

13. In its activities, ROE will ensure the coordinated delivery of the UNEP programme in the region, jointly with all global programmes concerned. Information on the work carried out with the European industrialized countries to develop new policies and environmental instruments will be widely disseminated to countries with economies in transition, thus facilitating the pan-European policy dialogue. The above activities will be carried out without any significant increase in the staff or resources of UNEP's ROE.

Annex

COUNTRIES WITH ECONOMIES IN TRANSITION

1. Albania
2. Armenia
3. Azerbaijan
4. Belarus
5. Bosnia and Herzegovina
6. Bulgaria
7. Croatia
8. Czech Republic
9. Estonia
10. Georgia
11. Hungary
12. Kazakhstan
13. Kyrgyzstan
14. Latvia
15. Lithuania
16. Poland
17. Republic of Moldova
18. Romania
19. Russian Federation
20. Slovakia
21. Slovenia
22. Tajikistan
23. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
24. Turkmenistan
25. Ukraine
26. Yugoslavia